

10 Steps to Preparing a Song for Performance

PRACTICE IDEAS IN AN APPROXIMATE ORDER

1 Map the Song

Look for things like repeats, da Capo/dal Segno, endings (ie. 1st, 2nd, etc) *as well as* sections which repeat and/or material you've already sung

3 Words & Translations

You *need* to know what you're saying. Even if it's in your native language, make sure you understand and know the meaning & implication of *every word*. If it's in a foreign language, coach pronunciations & translate it word-for-word - *not* the provided translation (this is usually a paraphrase) and *know it solid*

5 Phrasing

Phrasing is musical but is also tied to breath work & emotion. In classical rep, it is especially important to understand the style of phrasing for the era. When you know where each breath/phrase moves to, get it into your muscle memory

7 Roller Coaster Ride & Revisit

Write numbers 1-10 throughout your piece to map the "ups & downs" of your story. Play with Vocal Colours to emphasize this. Does it match your dynamics? Does it suit your phrasing? **Revisit Steps 3, 4, 5 & 6**

9 Use Your Music

Now that it's memorized, go back to your music. Record yourself singing and check every note, rhythm, dynamic -- all the details you've added to express your version of this song

2 Notes, Rhythms & Breaths

Start note-bashing! Use sounds (*not lyrics*) like bah-bah-bah, or lip trills to learn the notes. Clap and count rhythms. Mark your breaths - breathing is part of rhythm because it takes time to do. Solidify these *before* trying with lyrics

4 Character Work

Every story is told either through us (ie. pop songs, some liturgical texts) or by another character (ie. a musical theatre character, art song, opera). Who is singing this song? Why? Who are they singing to? What do they want? Create detailed answers to these & more questions

6 Word Painting, Frills & Dynamics

Observe/create dynamics (which may or may not be from the composer) within the style of your song. Search out interesting words that you can colour differently (ie. trills, riffs, smokey sounds, belting, etc) and add ornamentation (if appropriate)

8 Memorize It & Revisit

With all the work you've done so far, you're probably memorized, but if not, get it off the page. **Revisit Step 6 & 7** to be sure you have all the details memorized correctly

10 Accompanist Rehearsal

Meet with your accompanist. Communicate to them everything you've prepared. Play, collaborate, & *be open to new suggestions*. Or get it all together with a track - you may need to reconsider some of your choices in order to match the track

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& More to Consider...

Along with the 10 Steps listed above, you may choose to add in some of the following - at any point in the process...

- practice with a mirror
- choreograph movement or gestures
- work with an acting coach
- implement vocal technique you're currently building
- coach the song with another teacher or performer
- work with a dialect coach on accents
- consult someone who speaks the language your song is in
- work your phrasing & vocal colours by only singing the vowels of the words
- practice it super slow
- practice it super fast
- try it in a different key
- speak the words in rhythm
- speak the words not in rhythm (monologue it)
- write your lyrics by hand - choose to observe or disregard punctuation
- use a microphone if you'll be performing with one
- record yourself and listen
- tape yourself and watch
- look at the accompanist's music - how does it help or work against your part?
- watch/listen to other people performing this song
- if it's from a larger work, research the opera, musical theatre show, etc it's from
- meet more than once with your accompanist
- ask yourself "Why did the composer put a pause/rest/high note/long note/etc here?"
- ask yourself "Why is this intro/interlude/outro music happening?"
- do a rehearsal in the outfit, shoes, make-up, etc you'll wear for performance
- do a rehearsal in the location you'll be performing
- when things go well in practice, ask yourself "What did I do differently?" -write it in
- keep a practice log so you remember what you've done/still to do
- set clear goals for every practice session
- practice using your breath to "lead" your accompanist, even if you're not with them
- practice making different sounds than you're used to - play
- challenge yourself to come up with new riffs & ornamentation than you've heard before
- "practice perform" it for a small audience of friends and family
- set up some stuffed animals and sing to them
- rehearse your spoken introduction if you need to do one
- rehearse your songs in order if you're doing more than one song for performance
- and oh, OH so many more...

But above all ALWAYS HAVE FUN! Your brain won't learn if it's stressed, so keep it fresh & play!